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ABSTRACT

Project SPECIAL (Special Paraprofessionals Educating Children in Active Learning) trains handicapped college students to work as assistants in schools for special needs students. The project is intended to provide models for handicapped students, upgrade the quality of special education aides, and encourage human service agencies to hire the handicapped as paraprofessionals. Project SPECIAL provides a competency based special education paraprofessional program for 50 handicapped college students as well as on the job vocational experience. Results of the Tennessee Self Concept Test indicated an overall increase in self esteem, and academic achievement gains were noted as well. (CL)

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# WHEN HANDICAPS COME IN HANDY*

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CHILDREN'S CHOICE SCHOOL - MISSION VIEJO, CALIFORNIA
ITOP SCHOOL - EL TORO, CALIFORNIA

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SADDLEBACK COMMUNITY COLLEGE
DISTRICT


Abstract

PROJECT SPECIAL is a three-year certificate program to train 50 handicapped college students as teacher assistants in pre-school, elementary and secondary classrooms while they earn credits toward an AA degree. It provides support services as needed and also provides on-the-job experiences for vocational exploration in the educational/human services field as well as academic opportunities for transfer into related BA programs.

The purposes of the project are to: 1) upgrade the quality of special education aides serving K-12 handicapped students within our district, 2) provide models for handicapped children, and 3) motivate educational institutions and other human services agencies to hire the handicapped as paraprofessionals. To accomplish these goals, the project will provide 1) a competency-based special education paraprofessional program for 50 handicapped college students, 2) on-the-job vocational experience which can lead to a variety of positions within the broad human services job cluster, 3) an ongoing evaluation of the project, and 4) dissemination of the results.

The program, conducted within the Special Education option of Saddleback College's Human Development Department, offers a Human Development core of courses as well as additional courses and work experience based on the specific disability which the students want to develop as a training specialty. As a competency-based model, it contains the flexibility to work around the restrictions of the PROJECT SPECIAL student's handicap by providing for alternative demonstrations of content mastery. Field work takes place at four selected nearby training sites, which serve various types of exceptionalities.

Testing recently administered to the participants in this program indicates a marked increase in their self-concept, and academic achievement equal to or excelling that of able-bodied students at the college.

A dissemination plan includes completed video and slide tapes describing the program, along with brochures and handbooks.

## WHEN HANDICAPS COME IN HANDY

By Roberta Berns

In a society where so much stress is placed on attractiveness and achievement, how does a handicapped individual who doesn't conform to society's standard of either, gain self-esteem or motivation to contribute to such a society?

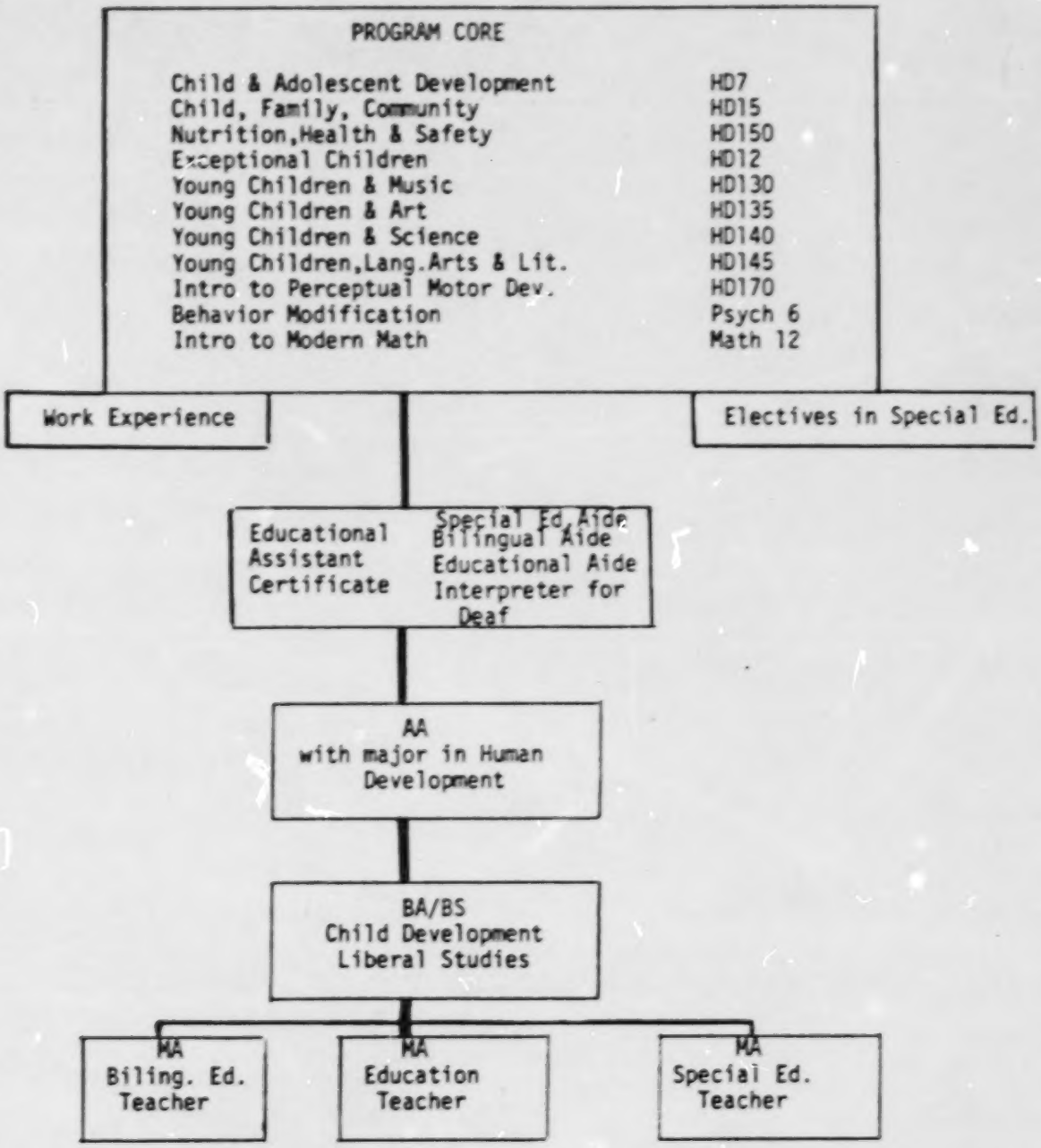
Project SPECIAL (Special Paraprofessionals Educating Children In Active Learning) was designed and implemented for the purpose of providing positive role models for handicapped children and providing a career option heretofore unavailable for the handicapped, to work in the education/human services fields (see Table I for Career Ladder). As a result of Project SPECIAL, it has become clear that handicaps can come in handy.

Betty, left blind, deaf, mute and paralyzed after complications resulting from surgery is one illustration. In intensive therapy for two and one-half years, Betty was retrained to use her muscles. Much of her vision, hearing and speech abilities returned. She still requires special glasses and speaks very slowly. Betty has regained some of her motor abilities but relies on crutches and her motorized wheelchair to get around. Because of her severe disabilities, Betty was most reluctant to reenter the mainstream. However, during the latter part of 1979 Betty had heard about Project SPECIAL, a program designed to train students who are inconvenienced due to a handicap to work as assistants in schools for children with special needs. This program was especially interesting to Betty because during her physical therapy treatments she had the opportunity to observe handicapped children and admired their courage and determination. She felt that because these children inspired her to reenter the mainstream she could be an inspiration or a model to children like herself - children with handicaps that could be overcome.

TABLE I

PROJECT SPECIAL

Student Career Development Ladder

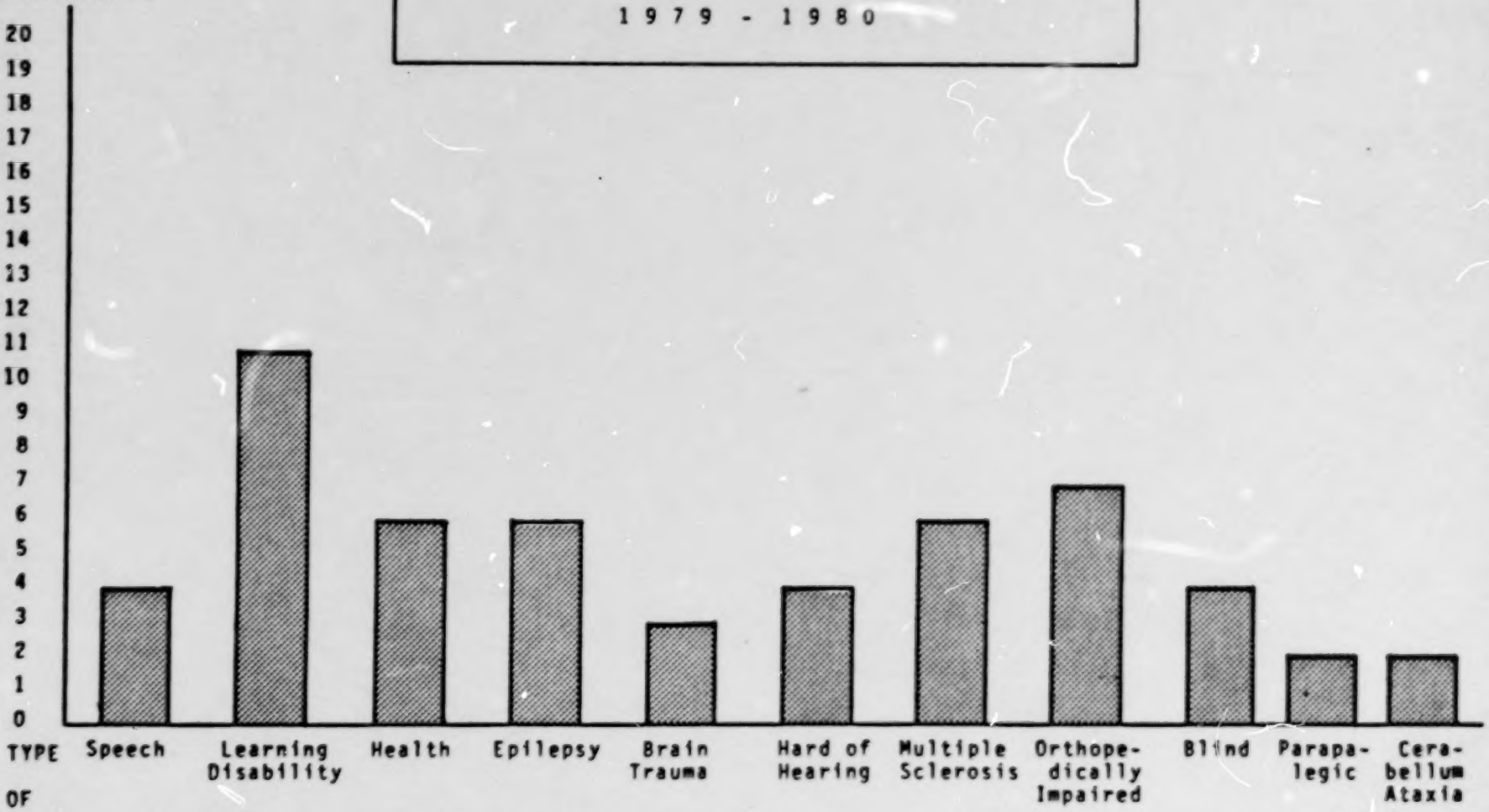

PROGRAM CORE
Child & Adolescent Development HD7
Child, Family, Community HD15
Nutrition,Health & Safety HD150
Exceptional Children HD12
Young Children & Music HD130
Young Children & Art HD135
Young Children & Science HD140
Young Children,Lang.Arts & Lit. HD145
Intro to Perceptual Motor Dev. HD170
Behavior Modification Psych 6
Intro to Modern Math Math 12
Work Experience
Electives in Special Ed.
Educational Assistant Certificate
Special Ed. Aide
Bilingual Aide
Educational Aide
Interpreter for Deaf
AA with major in Human Development
BA/BS Child Development Liberal Studies
MA Biling. Ed. Teacher
MA Education Teacher
MA Special Ed. Teacher

Betty has been enrolled in Project SPECIAL at Saddleback College for a year. She, along with nineteen other handicapped students (see Table II for Types of Handicaps), take regular coursework in human development and education three mornings a week and spend two mornings a week working at a nearby school for children with special needs (see Table III for Competencies, Goals and Evaluation Methods). Through Betty's participation in such a project some significant impacts have occurred for the children, the childrens' teachers,and for Betty.

Betty's impact on the children is that they have a positive role model - a real live handicapped adult who has a career and who assists them to reach maximum potential in school. Alfred Bandura's research (1973) notes that models who are nurturing or provide rewards for the child are most likely to produce imitation. The most prominent models in a child's life, according to Bandura, are his/her parents, siblings, teachers and peers. Urie Bronfrenbrenner's research (1970) indicates that when children perceive that a model is highly similar to themselves, the modeling influence can be quite strong. Thus, if the goal of educating handicapped children is to enable them to become contributing adults in society, then having a handicapped adult as a model will be very effective in motivating them to attain a career. As Betty works with the children, she prods them on by saying, "I know you can do it, I did."

The teachers of the handicapped children have been impacted by the presence of a handicapped assistant. As much learning took place for the teachers as did for the student assistants in Project SPECIAL. How can a person with only 40% vision help a nine year old with his reading? How can a person in a wheelchair assist in physical education? As a result of Project SPECIAL, the teachers of the handicapped children in the participating special schools received some real insights into the capabilities

## TABLE II
## PROJECT SPECIAL STUDENTS
## 1979 - 1980




* Please note: some students had more than one handicapping condition

TABLE III

RELATIONSHIP OF COMPETENCIES TO PROJECT SPECIAL GOALS & METHODS OF EVALUATION TO VERIFY ATTAINMENT

| GOALS | COMPETENCY TO DEMONSTRATE: | TYPE OF SKILL | PLACE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT | METHOD OF EVALUATION |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| To enable a child to follow directions | 1.Ability to carry out instructions from supervisor | E | Training Site | Evaluation, interview from supervisors |
| To enable a child to get along with others | 2.Ability to get along with administrators, professionals (teachers & counselors) parents and children | E | Training Site | Evaluation from and/or interview with professionals at training site, parents and children |
| To enhance a child's self-esteem | 3.Knowledge of child growth and development | T | Child & Adolescent Dev. (HD7) | Grade C or better |
| To motivate a child to reach his/her maximum potential | 4.Knowledge of characteristics of exceptionalities | T | Exceptional Children (HD12) | Grade C or better |
| To foster independence in a child | 5.Knowledge of individual learning styles and ability to adapt to them | T&E | Child & Adolescent Dev., Exceptional Ch.(HD7,HD12) Training Site | Grade C or better,sample lesson plans |
| | 6.Knowledge of various educational programs | T | Intro to Education (ED 1) | Grade C or better |
| | 7.Knowledge and ability to use behavior modifications | T&E | Behavior Mod.(Psych 6) Training Site | Grade C or better, task performance rated by supervisor |
| To motivate a child to reach his/her maximum potential | 8.Knowledge and ability to perform some specific skills used in classroom-language arts, math, science, art and music | T&E | Intro to Modern Math(M-12) Yng Ch & Music (HD130) Yng Ch.& Art (HD135) Yng Ch.&Science (HD140) Yng Ch.Lit & Lang.(HD145) | Grade C or better, Task performance rated by supervisor |
| To foster independence in a child | 9. Knowledge of health and safety and ability to administer first aid | T&E | Training Site Nut.,Health & Safety(HD150) | Grade C or better,task performance rated by supervisor |
| To enhance a child's self esteem-To enable a child to follow directions | 10.Ability to communicate with children | E | Training Site | Evaluation form and/or interview w/supervisor , parents and/or children |

(E=Experiential (acquired in training site) T=Theoretical (acquired in class work)

of handicapped individuals. Keith, a 59 year old diabetic whose sight had deteriorated to a mere 40%, was able to work on remediation activities in reading and math with the handicapped youngsters. Keith's supervising teacher provided the Project SPECIAL staff with the years' list of vocabulary words and math problems. The words and numbers were transcribed onto white cards in very large black thick writing. Keith, now had his own curriculum materials to work with the children.

Another illustration of how handicaps come in handy is Brian, a young man in his late twenties, injured in an automobile accident which resulted in paralysis from the waist down. Brian entered Project SPECIAL to get experience working with handicapped children. Being confined to a wheelchair himself, he was able to understand the frustrations and potentialities for physical education of the handicapped. He spent his time in Project SPECIAL as a student assistant developing activities to enable children in wheelchairs and on crutches to experience success. He was not only a role model for the children with whom he worked, but for the able-bodied physical education teacher with whom he worked, too. Brian is continuing his education and is now teaching a class in therapeutic recreation for the disabled at Saddleback College. He is working with other handicapped adults to develop a sports camp for disabled children. Basketball, tennis, bowling, archery are some of the activities being planned.

Brian, as well as Keith and Betty, have demonstrated that handicaps can come in handy if one is willing to use them to inspire others to become capable rather than incapable.

The impact on Betty, Keith, Brian and the other students enrolled in Project SPECIAL of helping handicapped children become handicapable children, has been a rise in their self-esteem. This rise was reported by the participants themselves, and was measured by the Tennessee Self-Concept Test (developed by Dr. William Fitts, and published by Counselor Recording and Tests, Box 6184 Acklen Station, Nashville, Tennessee). A pretest was administered to each individual prior to participation in Project SPECIAL and a post test was administered at the end of 5-8 months participation in the project (see Table IV for Summary of Results).

In summary, the test measures identity (feelings about what I am), self-satisfaction, behavior (feelings about how I act), physical self (feelings about appearance, skills, sexuality), moral ethical self (feelings of being a "good" or "bad" person), personal self (sense of adequacy as a person), family self (sense of adequacy as a family member) and social self (sense of adequacy in relation with others).

The single most important score on the Tennessee Self Concept Test is the total P score. It reflects the overall level of self-esteem. Persons with high P scores tend to like themselves, feel that they are persons of value and worth, have confidence in themselves and act accordingly. The change in the total P score from pre to post tests was examined. Every participant's total P score increased. The range in increase of total P scores was from 1 point to 10 points. The average measure was 5.16 points. This indicates an overall increase in self-esteem among the Project participants as well as individual increases.

Another important score on the Tennessee Self Concept Test is the Distribution (D) score. This score is a summary of the way one distributes his answers. It is

also interpreted as a measure of the certainty about the way one sees oneself. High D scores indicate the individual is very certain in what he says about himself while low scores mean the opposite. The changes in the D scores from pre to post tests were examined. Every participant's D score increased. The range of increases of D scores was from 2 points to 20 points. The average increase was 15.37 points. This indicates every project participant became more certain and more confident about him/herself. In addition to the positive results of the Tennessee Self Concept Test, the success rate of the students in Project SPECIAL attest to the validity of the program (see Table V for Follow-Up). Sixty-eight percent of the students successfully completed the first year of the program and enrolled in the second year. The average grade point of all Project SPECIAL students was 3.2 as compared to 2.7 for the average Saddleback College freshman. (see Table VI for Services Used). Eighteen percent transferred to a four-year school and another eighteen percent took jobs in education or human services. Only thirteen percent left the program during the first year.

When the results of the pre and post Tennessee Self Concept Tests were discussed with the Project SPECIAL participants, each was asked for an explanation of the positive change in their self concepts. The most frequent answer was, "I realized I could do something worthwhile."

This explanation, I feel is most significant in regard to society's traditional methods of dealing with its handicapped citizens. The handicapped have been regarded as dependents, to be supported by parents or social security. It is only within the last decade, as indicated by Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (PL 93-112) and the Education for All Handicapped Children's Act of 1975 (PL 94-142) that society is realizing the benefit of having handicapped people become independent

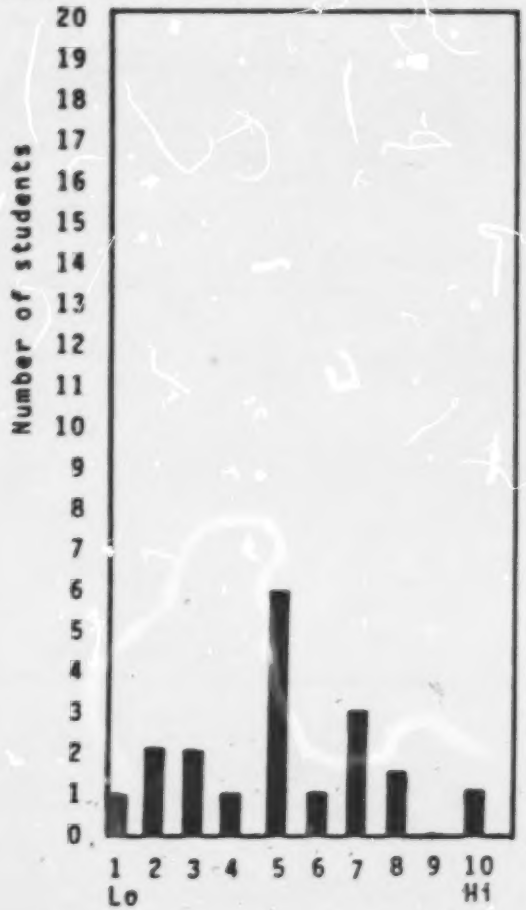
citizens, able to support themselves and contribute to society according to their abilities.

Handicapped people, like the students in Project SPECIAL, like Betty, Keith and Brian,are capable of contributing to society. And when they are given the opportunity to demonstrate their capabilities, they in turn become role models for children who are handicapped and do not yet know what faces them in the future. Thus, handicaps can come in handy.

TABLE IV

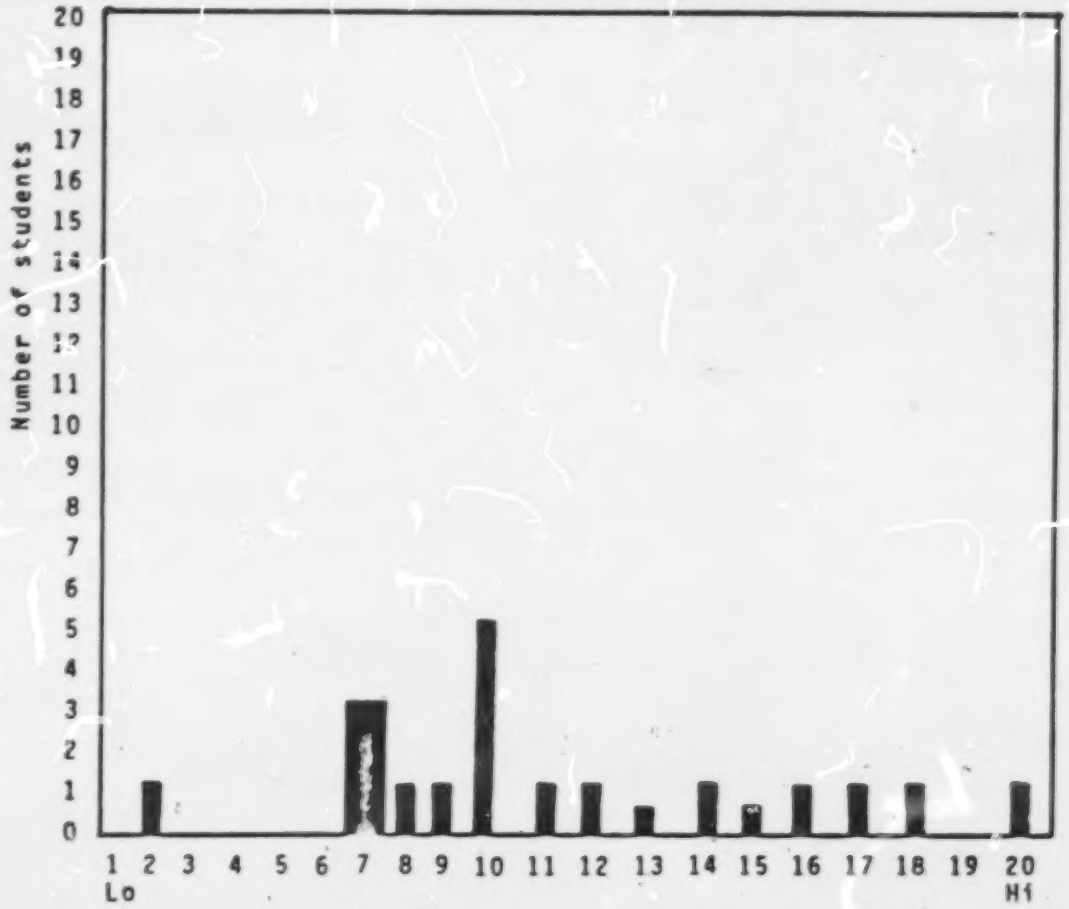
SUMMARY OF RESULTS OF TENNESSEE SELF CONCEPT PRE-POST TEST DIFFERENTIAL

TOTAL P SCORE DIFFERENTIAL
(Reflects Overall Level of Self-Esteem)




P Scores
(Avg. Diff.= 5.16 Pts.)

D SCORE DIFFERENTIAL
(Reflects Certainty about Way One Sees Self)




D Scores
(Avg. Diff.= 15.37 Pts.)

TABLE V

PROJECT SPECIAL FOLLOW UP 1979-80

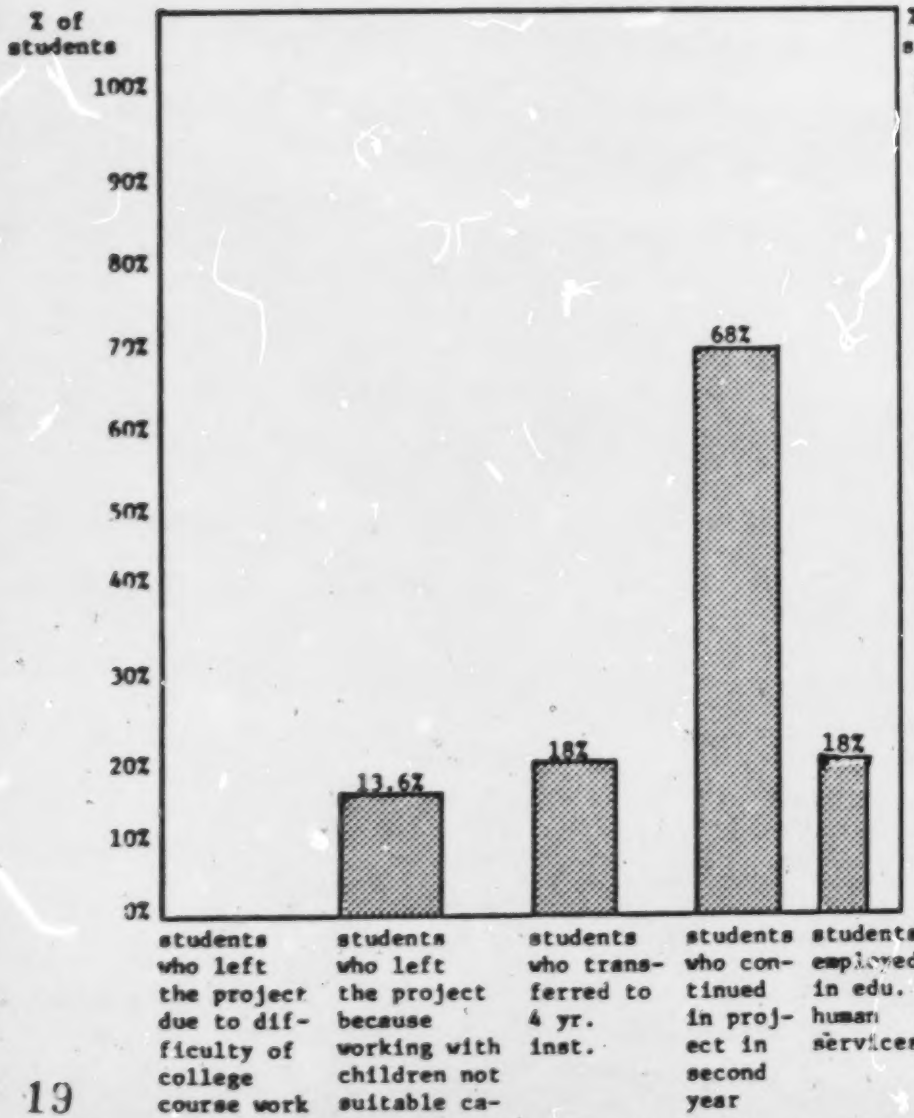
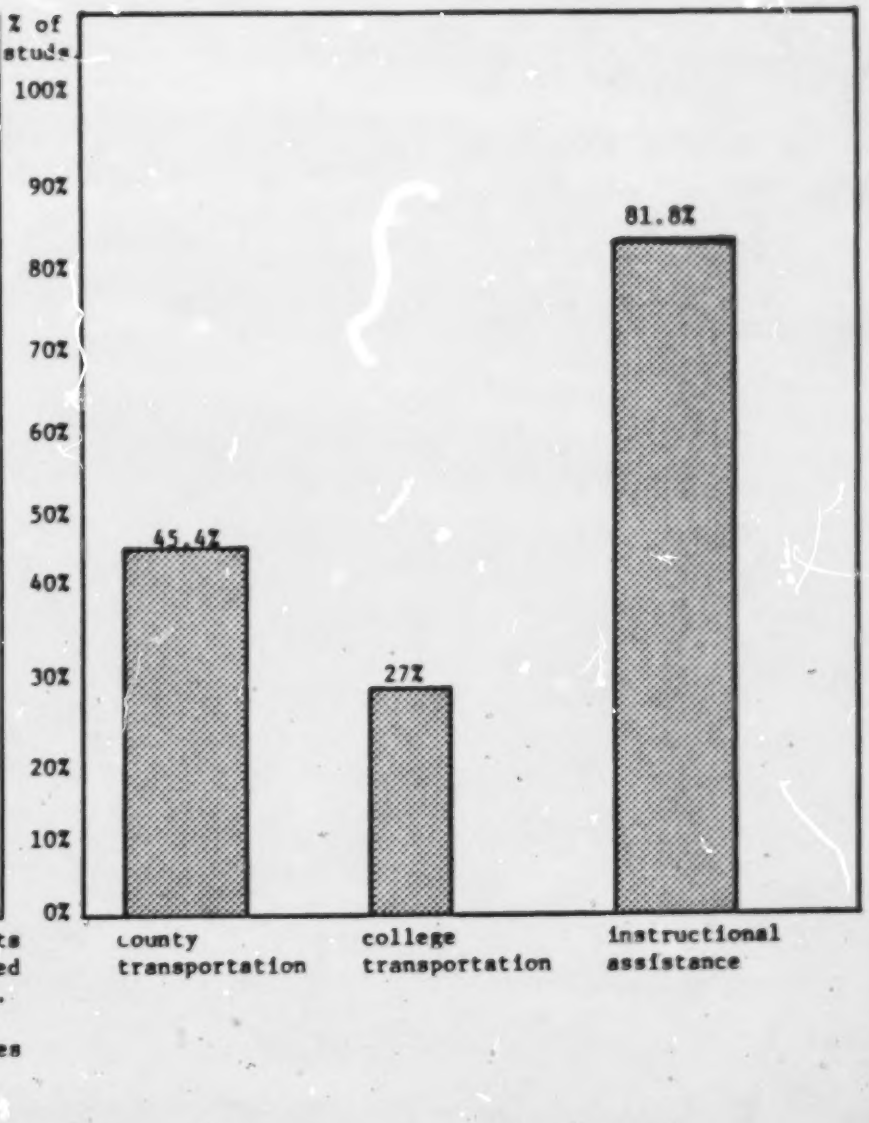



TABLE VI

SERVICES USED BY PROJECT SPECIAL 1979-80



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